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And the Captain Answered

And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. - - - Acts 22:28

Octave Thanet

French



AND THE CAPTAIN ANSWERED

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By

OCTAVE THANET
AUTHOR OF
The Man of the Hour, The Lion's Share
By Inheritance, etc.

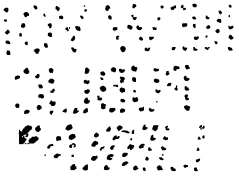
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AND THE CAPTAIN ANSWERED

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And The Captain Answered

CHAPTER I

HER BOY

ONLY two members of the battery were outside the train, Captain Winthrop and Private Victor Hardy. The "boys" had marched through the long wide streets of the midwestern town, packed with a black, swaying, cheering mass of their fellow citizens, while the bands blared *Marching through Georgia* and the *Star-Spangled Banner.* They had gathered be-

fore the club house of the town and had heard the men whom they had been reared to respect praise them and promise to guard their families, a promise loyally kept, by the way; and mentioned here because such promises are not always loyally kept. Now, all were aboard the cars—or as they liked to phrase it—entrained, except only the Captain and Private Hardy. The Captain remained on the station platform the better to be sure every one of his men was safe on the train. The private who had been detailed on special duty had just reported.

Beside each of the two soldiers

stood a pale and smiling woman, his mother. Mrs. Winthrop was slender, tall, with a mist of silver just beginning to glint in her black hair. The Captain's dark eyes were an exact replica of her fine, dark eyes. Her bearing and voice were charming and there was about her an air of distinction and elegance as much in her person as in her careful toilet. At moments her eyes rested on her son with a flicker of pain, instantly dispelled. She talked only of the lightest, most prosaic things, making a laughing appointment to visit him before long at the camp in Des Moines. All about her was a surg-

ing background of women's faces, under the arches of the station in the glare and the shadows of the electric lights; some of the faces sodden with tears, but most of them illumined by determined courage. Mingled scantily with them and fringing the edges of the background everywhere were men's faces, composed and cheerful. The men in general did not believe there would be war with Mexico; where they were convinced of its imminence they belittled its effects, but the women, having more imagination and less logic, were more deeply moved.

The war was very real to Private

Hardy's mother. Hers, too, was a figure and a face to arrest the eye, but her beauty was of another type than that of the Captain's mother; softer, less assured. She was of rather low stature and of a comfortable, not unwieldy plumpness. Little tendrils of her soft brown hair curled about her ears. One could guess that ordinarily there was a pretty rose flush on the cheek so pale to-day. Her dress was as neat, as tasteful, as trig as the other's. Only a woman's trained eye would have recognized a difference. She was like hundreds of her kind who are met in literary clubs ardently listening—often to

women who know less than they themselves.

She had taken off one glove. And as she stood, unnoticed by her son, her hand every now and then reached out and very lightly touching a fold of his khaki, furtively stroked it. He was a young fellow of no especial mark, barely tall enough to be accepted in the guard, with a plain, freckled, pleasant face. A boy to pass in a crowd, but his mother's eyes rested on him with the same adoring love, the same high pride which shone in Mrs. Winthrop's dark eyes as they lingered on her young Captain's splendid figure. And

when she suddenly looked from him to Private Hardy and his mother a flash of sympathy passed between the two women.

"All aboard!" came the crisp order.

For a second Mrs. Hardy flung her arms passionately about her boy's neck. *"Remember!"* she whispered.

He nodded assent, but his face clouded. Then she saw it lighten and glow as, lifting his hand stiffly, he saluted. At the gesture she turned and saw their neighbor's daughter, Amy Carruth, who had gone to High School with Victor. To little Mrs. Hardy the Carruths

represented a higher social station. Mrs. Carruth was a widow but she kept two maids and a gardener who on occasions donned cap and gloves to guide the family automobile. Victor, his mother well knew, admired Amy from afar with infinite diffidence. His fancy never vaulted to the height of paying her attention. Now, he smiled on her as on an equal, and although rather an awkward lad—his mother would have denied such a charge warmly—he swung himself out from the moving platform and with one swift arm deftly caught the roses which she threw him. There was a look in the girl's eyes

that for him was never there before. That, also, his mother saw. Her voice didn't swell the cries of good-by and good-luck which rattled among the bass-viol honks of the motor horns; but she waved her handkerchief and kept bravely the stiff smile on her face until the train dwindled to a long thin blur and vanished among the switch lights and the shadows.

Then she dabbed at her eyes and tried to swallow a sob, when a hand on her shoulder, very kindly and gentle, roused her. "May I take you home, Mrs. Hardy?" asked the Captain's mother.

The private's mother turned and

one could see that she limped ever so slightly.

"It would be very good of you, Mrs. Winthrop," she answered gratefully. "I turned my ankle on that bad walk in front of the Library, two months ago, going out of the Woman's Club in too much of a hurry; and it hurts still now and then."

Mrs. Winthrop was politely sympathetic. Little Mrs. Hardy felt a glow of gratitude. They were two mothers who had sent their sons away to unknown danger.

CHAPTER II

HER EXPERIENCES

"Isn't war *terrible?*" she sighed.

"Yes," the other agreed, "but sometimes it is necessary." By now they were in the machine moving swiftly and with incredible ease and smoothness down the street. A faint intangible perfume exhaled from the roses in a little vase on the door panel. The soft summer night air came in through the open window. They could hear the noises of the street and the talk vibrating with excitement. "Oh,

tell me," persisted Mrs. Hardy, "do you think we shall really, truly have a war—fighting and killing people?"

"I hardly think we shall this time," replied the other woman very gravely. "And it would only be a little war, did it come, but I feel sure that we shall have a war later and that it will not be a small affair. Perhaps it is as well that we should have this little one now."

"Do you mean we shall get into the war with Germany?" faltered Mrs. Hardy. "That would be horrible!"

"Very horrible, but I doubt if we shall be able to avoid it."

"I can't believe that war should ever be necessary. I hate, I *hate* war."

"I remember," answered Mrs. Winthrop, "you had an eloquent paper before the Peace Department of the Woman's Club. I didn't agree with you, but I thought it a very—striking paper."

Unconsciously Mrs. Hardy was gripping and twisting her hands. A blur of red stained her cheek, mounted to her brow.

"I wondered," mused Mrs. Winthrop, "what personal experience of yours had made you feel so—intensely."

"Do you mind if I tell you?"

"Please tell me," said Mrs. Winthrop gently.

"It was like this. My father was a soldier in the Civil War. He went as a boy only eighteen; and he received wounds that made him an invalid for the rest of his life. I only remember him as going about in a wheeled chair. He died when I was a very little girl."

"My husband told me about him. He was quite wonderful. In spite of his affliction, he did so much."

"He did; he made a good living for his family. And he was patience itself. He didn't know of

his condition when he married my mother; it came on so gradually, but she often said that it wouldn't have made a pin's difference—she loved him so much. But she hated war because of what it had done to him; and she brought me up to hate it. He left us a comfortable little fortune, but the man he made executor without bond, because he was a prominent Grand Army man and had fought all through the war and bragged all through the rest of his life, invested it so badly it was all lost and mother and I—how we had to pinch and scrape. I can never forget how mother would sit with the tears

rolling down her face and tell me how dreadful was war!

"'Don't ever marry a soldier!' she would say; and I promised; but what good did it do. My husband belonged to the national guard. I didn't know he was a guardsman, I thought he was a grocer. So he was, but he belonged to the guard; enlisted for three years. I didn't dream that there would be a war; I was so happy I didn't think anything about it. I hardly objected when he re-enlisted. His father, you know, was an old Grand Army man who fought through the Civil War, Captain Victor Hardy."

"A very fine man, too,"—interrupted Mrs. Winthrop.

"Yes, a very fine man," acquiesced the other, a touch of the bitter in her speech, "yet he has caused me a great deal of suffering. He was always talking about the country; and he helped every old wreck that came along who pretended he had been a soldier; and he would give little Victor—his grandson—guns and toy soldiers; and he made fun of my peace principles—oh, very good-natured fun. I didn't mind. Then the Spanish War came. And my husband was a guardsman. He had to go. I knew then how my mother had felt. Captain

Hardy was very sober, but he was willing that his son should go; he was proud. He was willing and he was proud even when my husband had the fever—typhoid. He went down to nurse him. I couldn't go, it was only a week before little Mildred was born. He went, and he stayed with him until he died, just a few days later, and then he brought him home." She did not weep; but her lips quivered; for a minute she was silent; staring at the brilliantly lighted street which she did not see.

"It was terrible for you," said the other woman gently.

"You are a widow, too—you know," said Mrs. Hardy.

"Captain Hardy was very good to me—you mustn't think I wasn't fond of him. I was. I couldn't help it; he was so kind, so generous, so fond of the children; yet—it was a fi—a struggle between him and me all the time for little Victor. The child adored him. He used to sit listening to his stories of the war with rapt attention. There was an old Confederate officer on the next street; those two men were great cronies; and little Victor would listen to them until he would be fighting over their battles in his

sleep. When Captain Hardy died Victor took it awfully hard. He is a quiet, uncomplaining boy, but he suffered—I could see how he suffered. He used to wear a little flag pinned on his shirt. 'That's for our country,' he would say, 'grandfather made me promise to be a good man and take care of you and love our country.'

"When the Captain died I missed him, too; I couldn't help being very fond of him. He was a good man; and he was so good to us. He was a successful man, too. When he died he left a hundred thousand dollars besides his house." She spoke with a certain pride.

"Captain Hardy was as fine a man and as good a citizen as ever lived in this town," said Mrs. Winthrop.

"Yes, he was; and I tell Victor he'd cause to be proud of his grandfather. He was very generous to us; but there were four children, three girls and my husband. One of the girls was a widow, and one had a husband, an army officer who was retired, an invalid; and one of the girls who kept house for her father wasn't either very young or very strong; he divided his property among them and he gave an extra five thousand to Victor. Do you know Victor saved up the in-

terest on that money every year, never touched a cent. He was going to college with it, but his sister Mildred was such a bright girl; and she felt and I felt as if she ought to have a career. Victor is as good as gold, and he has a fine mind, a very fine mind, but—well, he isn't brilliant like Milly. And when I talked it over with Victor he saw it as I did. He went into the works you and your son own; and let his sister have his savings. She's in her junior year now at the State University, preparing for work in social settlements. She helped me a lot about that club paper you heard. She feels just as

I do about war. Victor is different. And yet—somehow, though he is a boy, we have seemed to be very close and to understand each other so well. We enjoy the same things and we laugh at the same little jokes; and we have been so much to each other. I can't quite understand some things that Milly feels, although I am sure they are the right things to feel, but I seem to understand how Victor feels without trying; just as he understands how I feel."

"He is a boy to be proud of," said Mrs. Winthrop.

The mother blushed happily: "I am proud of him, just as proud

as I am of Milly; but don't you think he did right to give her the chance?"

Mrs. Winthrop evaded the question. "How did Miss Mildred feel about her brother's sacrifice," said she. And she noticed a little cloud on the other's candid face. It seemed to her that Mrs. Hardy spoke a thought too earnestly.

"Oh, she is very grateful. She wanted the chance so, it would have broken her heart to have missed it. And she is doing so well. Vic, too, is proud of her. But I'm just as proud of Vic; and"— she smiled shyly—"I'm doing a little saving to surprise him, sometime."

Then the tears welled into her eyes. "Do you think the war will last long—that they will really go to Mexico?" she asked tremulously, forgetting she had asked the same question before.

"Honestly, I don't think this war is going to amount to much. But it may. All we can do is to pray our boys may come back safely. I think they will."

"Then Victor enlisted." Mrs. Hardy again took up her narrative. "He told me he had promised his grandfather; and the day he was twenty-one, he did enlist; but he said the guard was only defending the country, it wouldn't go out-

side. He promised me solemnly he would not enlist in the regulars or the Federal service. But I heard a woman at the station saying those boys would all take the oath and be under the Federal service; can't they refuse to take the oath?"

"They can refuse, but—you wouldn't want your boy, the grandson of two brave soldiers and the son of another, to refuse to do his bit for his country. No woman has a right to ask her son to feel disgraced, even to save his life."

"To save his life I would ask anything," cried Mrs. Hardy passionately. "And it is not a wrong thing I ask of him. It's the only

right thing! I ask him to refuse to murder other women's sons. Just as you talk his grandfather used to talk, but when he died I thought, now the battle between us is over, now my boy is mine; he can't take him away from me and send him into danger and—maybe—death. He was stronger than I while he lived, but I thought I had won when he died. For the dead can't fight."

"You are mistaken," said Mrs. Winthrop. "The dead are stronger than we are. They are beyond our reach, but we are not beyond theirs. Weak—the dead? Why, they are the only ones whose strength we

can not fight!" Then, as if fearing she had said too much, she added in a lighter tone: "If we turn here, we can have one more glimpse of them; shall we take it?" Mrs. Hardy agreed thankfully.

The limousine turned noiselessly when Mrs. Winthrop gave the order and sped to the darker quarter of the city. There was the train; there were the open cars with the battery's cannon gray and grim. The windows of the coaches were filled with sleek young heads and waving khaki-clad young arms. Once again the motor horns made a shrill tumult, piercing the shouts; the engine whistle answered; and

in a minute the car lights rolled away far down the curve of the hill.

Little Mrs. Hardy was crying quietly, but the Captain's mother sat erect with steady eyes and a white smiling face.

"It would be a selfish love," she said, "that would deny them a beautiful moment like this. They want to go, they want to serve their country; and all their lives will be the richer for it—"

"But if they die—"

"Could they have a better death? And we have a country, too, shall we grudge our best to it? Shall we ask other women to sac-

rifice their dearest while we withhold ours?"

"Ah, but don't you see," burst in the other. "Oh, don't you see that it's cruel and wicked? Only by our withholding our own can we convince other people, and make war impossible!"

"War is very dreadful," Mrs. Winthrop agreed in a level quiet voice, which somehow gave Mrs. Hardy an impression of a deep, though controlled earnestness. "Very dreadful; but there are far more dreadful things; national dishonor is more dreadful; to lose the hopes and ideals of our forefathers because we are too cowardly or too

mercenary or too sentimental to fight for them is more dreadful! It is more dreadful for us to stand idly by and see hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women and children killed or starved to death; to see women hideously misused, to witness all the liberties of small peoples wrenched from them, and every kind of cruelty and greed triumphant. Oh, there are many more dreadful things than war! War with all its horrors is saving the souls of England and France and Russia. War some day will save ours, for believe me, dear Mrs. Hardy, war we shall surely have!"

"I can not see it," replied Mrs.

Hardy bitterly; but having said, she fell silent; nor did the Captain's mother try to persuade her further; instead she was infinitely kind and gentle and spoke of practical details and of planning to visit their sons at the training camp.

CHAPTER III

HIS GRANDFATHER

Meanwhile Victor Hardy was sitting erect in his seat, unconsciously assuming a military stiffness of pose, with the very strangest emotions of his uneventful young life burning his heart within him. He tingled with the remembrance of the glance that Amy Carruth had given him. So vaguely that no nerve apprised him of its significance he felt himself enhanced in his own self-esteem. He was a diffident lad who rated himself too low as naturally as

many young men rate themselves too high. Even now he would not admit in his reverie that the girl who had always been the one girl to him had looked on him with a glint of admiration in her kindliness; yet he felt it in every fiber of him. And he felt it was because he was a soldier. "She loves our country, too," he thought.

His grandfather's image never forgotten, nor even greatly dimmed by the years, came to him in the distinctness of his childish vision. Words and phrases only faintly comprehended were illuminated into their real meaning, though not distinctly enough for words of

his own. He understood the old soldier's ardor.

He could see the lights twinkling and fading among the trees on the dark hillsides. They seemed to mean to him not merely homes of his fellow townsmen, some stately, some humble; but all the kindly, neighborly habit of American life, the good offices in trouble or sickness, the sympathy, the homely cheer, the humorous comfort if a man was discouraged, all the open-hearted friendliness in whose warmth he had grown to manhood, feeling it but not thinking about it; and his heart swelled with a new affection for it all. At

the same breath he recalled his grandfather's words; he realized what is love of country, that mystical, misunderstood, misused emotion which rests like a sword in a scabbard most of the time, but comes out flashing mightily in the hour of peril; he realized it was not only love of the fair heritage on earth bequeathed by the fathers; it was not land or gear, it was not even the kindly people of his blood who lived about him; but it was the men of all the past whose heroism had not been in vain, the gaunt pioneers who fought hunger and the savages; the men at Valley Forge who limped through the snow with

their worn shoes and their bleeding feet; the brave lads on sea or shore who fought in the Civil War, whose sacrifice and heroism belong to us all equally whether they wore blue or gray; the lads just as brave who sickened and died in the fever camps of the Spanish War; it meant all the past. And it meant the future.

"That's what the flag means, son,"—he could hear his grandfather's voice and the tap of his wooden heel as he prodded his emotion home on the cement walk. "That's what the flag means, everything; all we fought for in the past; all we work for to-day,

all we hope for; a better chance for every man and a better man to take the chance. They call it a symbol, they say symbols are not real things; I guess symbols are the soul of things."

If his grandfather were only alive now! He would be an old man nearing eighty (which seemed a great age to the young fellow); but he was a lad of nineteen, younger than Victor, when he first buckled on his soldier's belt and first lifted his hand to swear allegiance to the Republic. He had kept his oath; through privations and suffering and wounds and mutilation and innumerable aspects

of danger. How he would have waved and cheered to see him, the third Victor, taking his place behind the colors!

Thoughts vague and wandering and indistinct, yet glowing, throbbed through him; for hours he was awake. His companions' jests reached him now and then; that jocose flippancy with which the strong heart of America masks its molten ardor or its tenderness.

"Some town, boys, not?" called one of them. "Oh, we'll give them something for the first page if we get at the greasers!"

"What a bunch they are!" Victor mused proudly with a swelling

heart. "What a country to fight for!" At last he drifted into sleep. But no sleep came all that night to his mother's fevered eyelids.

CHAPTER IV

HER FEARS

Instead of abating as the days went by, Ellen Hardy's distress of mind and grisly fears steadily waxed greater. They swelled in her soul like some noxious seed. And whenever in his frequent letters Victor mentioned his grandfather (who seemed constantly in his thoughts) an obsession of dread came on her. After all her prayers, after all her tears, all her unremitting efforts to influence her son, and to combat that dead man's strong soul, was he slipping from

her grasp? Could he who had never broken his word be wanting to break it now?

More than once in the letters which she tried pathetically to make interesting to him, disguising her secret turmoil under a sprightliness foreign to her (for she was quite too earnest a creature to joke very much) more than once by implication rather than directly she tried to suggest to him the question which she dared not put. Once she wrote: "Madam Vibert had such an interesting paper before the club yesterday; it was on the difference between American sons and French sons regarding

their mothers. She drew a beautiful picture of the devotion of French boys to their mothers; how attentive they were and affectionate and confiding; but I thought I knew one American boy who was just as nice and polite as any French boy and who had a truthfulness and regard for his word which I like to think is typically American. But then I guess I don't know so much about French boys as I thought I did; anyway, it is lovely the way they treat their mothers; but not any lovelier than the way my boy has treated his mother, and you never told me a lie in your life, nor made me a

promise that you didn't keep." He made no answer to this beyond assuring her that she was the very best mother in the world, and as to telling lies, his grandfather had taken care of that for him. He knew how mean it was.

Victor had always been rather an inarticulate soul. Instead of saying things he was prone to do little practical acts of kindness. His mother would find the room dusted or the woodbox filled. Once she found an exceptionally towering pile in the woodbox; she hadn't asked him to fill it or thought of his filling it, but when she spoke of it he answered with his shy smile:

"I just had to do it, you were looking so pretty."

She sent him every military comfort of which she could think, or discover, through Mrs. Winthrop, with actual joy sacrificing the money she had laid by for her winter hat and suit. She make cakes. She cooked sweetmeats which, guided by Mildred's austere hygienic creed, she had formerly condemned and forbidden her larder. She knitted for him; she took lessons in useful garments for soldiers from an unprincipled Red Cross nurse who had been at the front and liked to talk about it to the equally unprincipled young so-

ciety girls and matrons who liked to hear. She learned first aid to the injured; it might be that some day her knowledge would be of use.

But she vowed with set lips it must be for fighting in defense of their own soil, not ravaging a neighbor's land in a wicked lust of rapine or conquest. Yet there were times when to her unutterable self-reproach she felt a thrill as she caught the note of a bugle or saw the flag flutter and its fair colors burn against the sky. She had an ever-growing dread lest her influence should wane; lest that dead man should regain his ascendency

over her son. Then—but he had never broken his word; this was his solemn promise that he would not fight save on his own soil, in defense, not in aggression.

Yet all the time the fear of it was like a cold terror, coiled in the far recesses of her heart; it stirred with every letter which she opened. And one day it was justified.

Victor told her in a few words that he had no right to make her the promise which he had made; he had felt it more and more since he had been in camp; didn't she feel different, too?

She sat down and thought. In the morning's paper she had read

that the Federal oath was to be administered to the boys at camp the same afternoon. She read over the date. There was no mistake. Feeling as he did Victor would break his word and take the oath.

Facing her was an old photograph carefully framed showing her husband as a boy and his father sitting on their big western porch with a great flag drooping over the door. The Captain was in his service uniform, the lad in a copy of it; and they had been photographed, as the date showed, on a far-away Decoration Day.

She looked at the rugged, kindly face with the firm, clean-shaven

chin and the military mustache. What steady eyes he had. What a will.

"You think you have conquered," she flashed, clenching her hands; a bitter resentment rising and flooding her soul, "but you haven't, you shan't!"

She knew now every train to Fort Dodge. Fort Dodge—the camp—was named after Iowa's great general, his old commander whom the Captain loved, to whom he wrote every year on a certain battle anniversary day. "A wonderful man," the Captain used to declaim, "as wonderful in peace as in war. They'll put up a monu-

ment to him when he's gone, why don't they begin now; but it doesn't matter, the Union Pacific Railway is his monument." The Captain would have liked their naming the camp where the guard gathered for his idol.

The mother hated the very name; in that cruel moment she almost hated the old man who had been so kind yet so ruthless. Like hammer blows on her heart she heard again Mrs. Winthrop's words—"Weak? The dead? Why, they are the only ones whose strength we can not fight."

"But I will fight," she vowed. Rapidly she planned to take the

next train. Mrs. Winthrop had asked that she let her know should she propose to visit her son so that she might send her to the station and otherwise make the trip easier. Recalling the offer now, Ellen Hardy shook her head. "Not when I'm going on this kind of an errand," she muttered, "it wouldn't be fair." Then she added wearily, "I suppose she will never speak to me again, and I liked her so much —but it can't be helped."

CHAPTER V

HER PLAN

Her plan at first was simple enough. She was going to camp to see her boy and to beg him, with all the power of appeal and persuasion which she possessed, not to break her heart by taking the oath. She knew that there was no law to compel him; true, public opinion would be harsh with him, perhaps Captain Winthrop would dismiss him, and they had built so many hopes, so many plans on his success at the works. But her mother's father's forebears had been read out

of church and gravely harmed in their trade because they were abolitionists; Victor and she were of the same stock; they, too, could suffer for righteousness' sake if need be. Because she was not bloodthirsty it did not follow that she was a coward.

All through the journey—which was tiresome and uncomfortable, being in the crowded day coach which had started clean from somewhere but had accumulated peanut shells and dust and newspapers and very bad air from the presence of many of her fellow citizens who hated ventilation, and ate bananas and apples (worthy

and healthful food which she detested)—all through the journey she tried to marshal her arguments and her appeals and to make them more convincing, more persuasive. She sat beside a partly intoxicated man who talked about the necessity of stricter liquor laws and national prohibition; and there was a mother with two babies just recovering from the chicken-pox, exciting grave fears in the lady across the aisle, who was going to enlighten a neighboring woman's club and who all the way rehearsed her paper to herself in a low but expressive voice. Just in front, in tones only occasionally rising, two

men discussed the possibilities of Mexican warfare, and one related grisly experiences of his own cousin while the other had first-hand horrors to exhibit.

The low hills, the streams like silver ribbons, where the cattle stood knee deep and turned the gentle indifference of their gaze on the train, the ample farmsteads and silos, the villages with their winding, dark brown roads, and their motor-cars before the little stores; the trim towns with parks and shady streets, the homes of novel stateliness which peered through the wooded hills beyond their stone gateways—any other

time she would have viewed them all with eager interest; now her jaded gaze sought them only as a relief from the noisome interior of the car.

It was dazzling broad noon when the train rumbled and jerked into the solidly built streets of Des Moines.

Some lads in trigly buttoned khaki were on the platform. A queer, unexpected thrill quivered through her at the sight. They turned up the street and at the same moment a company with fife and drum and flag swung around the corner. The khaki-clad boys stood rigidly erect at salute.

Again that unexpected, unwelcome, strangely poignant thrill! Shaken and bewildered, she remained on the curbstone, her suitcase beside her. Thus standing, fragments of conversation from the bystanders drifted to her ears.

"Going to the camp?" It was a deep, rumbling bass voice.

"Yes." It was a thin, high tenor. "Soon as my car is ready. I got to carry some truck to one of them swell-headed officers."

"I understand they're going to take the Federal oath—a lot of them."

"Yes, and it's a black shame, too," piped the thin voice vehe-

mently. "Them boys didn't enlist to go fightin' greasers and being et up by typhis lice and sun pizened. Nor they ain't compelled to take the oath if they don't wanter."

"They seem to take it," retorted the bass dryly. "There was only three men out of the whole regiment they swore in yesterday wouldn't take it and not one day before."

"I know that, and what did they do to them three brave men that stood up for their convictions and their constitutional rights? They painted splashes of yellow over 'em and hissed and hooted and swore at 'em and stuck them off in a tent by

themselves like they was contagious. It makes me mad to see such goings on."

"Well, it don't me," came sonorously from the other, "it served them right. Hiding to save their own precious skins and letting decent folks get killed for 'em. I'd like to stand such pups again' a wall—"

Here the passing crowd drove a wedge between the speakers and the listener. But Mrs. Hardy caught her breath in a spasm of resolution. What she had resolved to do was contrary to every principle of her conscientious past. All the teaching of her life, all her own

code by which that life had been shaped caught at her with protesting hands. But she was impelled by a stern emotion which swept everything else away like chaff. With a set mouth she walked into the telegraph office and sent a telegram. Her hand trembled no more than did her lips as she framed the words:

"Have been terribly hurt. Come at once, Chamberlin Hotel.

"MOTHER."

Then, having sent the message, she walked out again into the sunny street. The chauffeur of the high voice, whom she had heard a

few moments before, was at the wheel of his car. She walked up to him.

"Are you going to Camp Dodge?" she asked.

"I'm going this afternoon, ma'am," he answered, not interested enough to wonder.

"I want to tell you something," said she. This time he did turn a languid interest upon her.

"I've got a boy out to the camp. I want him not to take the oath; he belongs to me, not to this Government."

"Sure he don't, lady," acquiesced the man; "but kin you stop him? Them boys is all on edge. There's

an unrighteous amount of pressure being brought to bear on 'em. Why, three or four boys who had the nerve to stand ag'in' 'em they stuck off in a tent by themselves, after they had splashed yellow paint over their uniforms. Now nobody speaks to them and they have to police the camp—clean up, that is; and—oh, they certainly do have a tough time."

Mrs. Hardy turned pale, but she did not waver. Had not her mother's father suffered for the right?

She unfolded her plan to the chauffeur.

"I get yer, lady," he chuckled in reply. "I can deliver the goods.

I'll only charge you five bucks for the job on account of you and me having the same principles. You say he don't know nothin' about machines? Well, the carburetor ought to be good for at least twenty minutes' delay; and the universal joint out of whack for a half an hour, anyhow, properly managed. Just steer the guy into my machine and you can rest easy."

CHAPTER VI

HIS DECISION

The bell-boy at the Chamberlin had spent the last twenty minutes straining his young ears to catch the conversation in 405. This bell-boy was a novel-reading youth. He had expected his hotel pathway to be sown thickly with situations of tragedy and romance. When the transoms and the doors ajar brought him nothing more thrilling than the most ordinary conjugal disputes, and when his one glance of ghastliness involved in the silent man behind the door de-

veloped into nothing worse than the drunken stupor of a traveling salesman, his disappointment began to become cynical. But when to-day a pale-faced young soldier, very stern and breathless, had demanded to be taken to Mrs. Hardy's room and had asked him in plain agitation of mind how was Mrs. Hardy, hope revived. He answered carelessly, "She was all right ten minutes ago when I brung her some ice-water," and noticed with pleasure that his answer seemed in some obscure way to excite the soldier. Therefore he made occasion to listen at the door. There was no question in his mind

that there was emotion of some kind exploding in the room. He caught a queer strangled cry of "Mother" which he couldn't understand. Then came a rapid interchange of question and answer, and sobbing entreaty. The voices were provokingly low keyed; but he was sure that he heard the woman say, "But I *was* hurt, I was *terribly* hurt," and once the boy said, "No, mother, I can't promise, I'd be a traitor if I did." Then there was something about grandfather which the bell-boy could not understand, and then the door opened and quite distinctly he heard the soldier say, "No, mother,

I must go right away. You see the Captain brought me out here himself; he was going for the General to fetch him and some others in, and I promised I'd come right back."

The mother said something so low that the bell-boy couldn't catch it, but he heard the soldier reply, "Very well, I'll take your man then; what's his name, Collins?" And there was a sound of sobbing farewell mingled with remonstrance.

"Kissin' him and cryin'," summarized the bell-boy. Immediately the soldier strode out into the hall, paler and sterner looking than be-

bore. He almost knocked the boy down before the latter could assume a proper position of sauntering ease.

"Do you know a man by the name of Collins who runs an automobile between here and Camp Dodge?" The bell-boy did know such a man. His opinion of Collins was not favorable, but he knew of him and he could take the soldier to him. He recommended, however, far more strongly, one Sanders (a near kinsman of his own, but this fact he did not mention) who was a crackerjack chauffeur and had a beautiful new Ford machine. The soldier, however,

held to his first choice; and Sammy Sanders, the bell-boy, watched Collins gather him in and bear him away, while Sanders, with the shining new Ford languished on the curb.

"Reckon she was tryin' to make him promise to quit the booze," thought Sammy; "but he's just bound and determined to fill a drunkard's grave; ain't it awful," he commented with dismal cheerfulness; feeling that now, at least, he was beginning to see life. He was sorry that he couldn't get a fare for his cousin, but the shadow of regret disappeared at the unexpected arrival of Mrs. Hardy her-

self on the scene. Her eyelids were red; beyond a doubt she had been crying. She asked Sammy could he find her an automobile to take her out to Camp Dodge? So sincerely did Sammy sympathize with her that he persuaded his kinsman, a kind-hearted young chap, to knock off fifty cents from his charge. With a heart swelling with that virtuous glow which comes to the benevolent doer of a good action, at no expense to himself, Sammy watched the new Ford spin down the road and flash around the corner.

CHAPTER VII

HIS FATHER'S SON

Which of the motley pack of emotions tearing at Ellen Hardy's heart like hounds yelping and biting impelled her to rush out to the sidewalk in pursuit of her son she did not know. Her misery was as confused as it was poignant. There was something so hideously unexpected and strange about it. To have Victor, her lover-son who had always sympathized, always admired, always trusted her; to have him judge and condemn her was incredible. The gifted Mildred

had always assumed the attitude of a leader, beckoning her to the heights. She believed implicitly in Mildred's superiority; but Victor was her comrade who admired everything she did. Now, he had not upbraided her; but his bewilderment and pain over her duplicity were far worse than reproaches.

She really had no new plan in her mind now; only a vague, overmastering impulse to see him again; to make him understand how she felt; to make him acquit her; and even at the last to save him. Then, too, the mother heart of her yearned over the unhappi-

ness which her own scheming must bring him. If he came too late he would be bitterly disappointed. Her mind rang the change of his sentences in the last interview; of the whirling words which had stunned her, trying, somehow, to make it plain to herself. All the while she was dimly conscious that the chauffeur was amiably acting as cicerone; describing the streets, the buildings, the vast advantages of Des Moines. He was an undersized, lean chap; deeply freckled, with sharp eyes and curly, pale brown hair. An ardent patriot himself, he had tried in vain to deceive the recruiting officer by three

years and make himself out eighteen. Since he could not enlist, his one consolation was to talk about the soldiers and appear a young man of military parts. He knew the names of all the officers and all the widely assorted gossip of the camp. This he imparted to his passenger, but only now and then did she hear a word that he said. Her mind had drifted back to her long combat with the dead Captain, for her son's soul. Somehow the arguments that had once seemed so convincing to her to-day looked futile and unreal.

They were crossing the fields; far away, beyond the stunted trees,

were the long lines of tents, the rough wooden buildings, the flags flying. She thought of her father. He would have sided with the old Captain. The breeze bore to her the faint notes of a bugle; and again that same amazing thrill shook her heart. She thought of Mrs. Winthrop, a soldier's daughter, but no more a soldier's daughter than she herself.

By now they were on the outskirts of the camp. Several men came out of one of the tents and stood looking about. Their uniforms were untidy and splashed with great streaks of yellow paint. Their shoulders stooped; there was

nothing military about their bearing.

"Uh-r-r-r, uh-r-r-r," grunted the chauffeur. "I'd like to get near enough to spit on 'em."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Hardy.

"They're the yellow cowards that wouldn't take the Federal oath! Well, they're getting theirs now; nobody'll have anything to do with 'em or to say to 'em. They was drummed out of their company and the boys daubed their uniforms with yellow paint, and they got to police the camp. They say one of 'em's mother kep' writin' him not to take the oath 'cause she believed war was so wicked."

Ellen Hardy wondered how that boy felt toward his mother. For the first time it came to her that her boy's life belonged to him. For the first time she realized the humiliation that he might have to suffer in such a case. She was making a martyr of him without giving him the martyr's faith.

Probably by now he was raging at the delay of his chauffeur. It was fortunate that he did not know how to run a machine himself; for she was sure that he was quite capable of commandeering the car if he suspected the chauffeur. Would they charge him with collusion in the delay?

All at once she became aware that she was deadly afraid of the consequences of her own plotting. Her mind went back to the days when she was trying to combat his grandfather's influence, but her sensations were queerly unsettled.

Across the fields she could see the long, dust-colored lines of men moving in military order; she could hear the clear notes of the bugle. They were stirring her heart as they had stirred the hearts of those two men—her husband and his father. The kindliest, the gentlest as well as the bravest of men, they had been. How often the old Captain had helped her! It was not out

of cruelty or wicked vanity that they had fought. It was because they loved their country and believed only war could save her. What if they were right! She couldn't argue about it; but the arguments that had seemed to her so beautiful and lofty turned, without warning, into tarnished and tawdry pleas.

This "community feeling" which Mildred was always praising—what was it but the narrowest beginning of patriotism. How could any one love another country as her own, any more than she could love another family as her own?

Without warning or logic it was

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as if a wall in her soul, preventing any sally of her vision into other views than those for which she had fought so long had toppled into wreck; and in a single, searing moment she saw as the old soldier had seen. The gentle, humorous, kindly hero who had not grudged his best to his country. His country? Her own country. And should other mothers' boys die to save her son?

"You have won," her soul cried. "Oh, save him the humiliation I tried to make for him!"

The young chauffeur was laughing. "Bet you there's a late chap," he chuckled, "look at that buzz wagon clipping it along!"

The khaki-clad ranks were marching in evolutions that she could not understand. By companies they marched up to a little group of men. Then, after some ceremony which she was too far away to comprehend they marched away again.

"They are taking the Federal oath," said Sanders. "I'll bet that chap's doin' his best licks to get in in time to take his."

Following the direction of the boy's finger she could see an automobile, a cloud of dust in its wake, recklessly plunging down the road. She recognized the car.

"Say, what's that feller doin'

with his gun?" cried the boy. "He ain't pointing it at the chauffeur in front, he's pointing it at the tires; has he got a jag on, or what's the matter?"

But, in a flash, what really had happened appeared clearly enough to Ellen Hardy. Her boy had discovered the trickery of his driver and had forced him to continue on the way by threatening to shoot his tires and then to send his comrades to punish the chauffeur.

"Going some," chuckled Sanders. "Wonder which company he's trying to catch?" The automobile turned into the turf and reeled wildly over the uneven ground.

She saw Victor spring from the car and race forward. A company, which had just marched from a group of guns and was standing at attention, she was sure was Victor's company.

"They are taking the oath," said Sanders.

"I do solemnly swear that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the United States of America and that I will serve them honestly and faithfully against all their enemies whomsoever."

His boyish voice took on a solemn, almost reverent cadence. He knew by heart the oath that he had longed so ardently to take. Ellen

Hardy caught her breath; she could no longer see her boy's figure because of the soldiers marching between. All at once she heard a sound like a cheer.

"He's got there," shouted Sanders, "he's got there in time!"

But Ellen Hardy was not certain. Not until later, when the men had broken ranks and her boy ran toward her and took her into his arms. His eyes were blazing; he was smiling. And with a thrill, half pang and half pride, she realized that it was not her boy whom she had shielded and worshiped and tried to mold into her own way of thinking, but a man, his

father's son, his grandfather's pride, who was holding her in such a strange, masterful way.

"I couldn't help it, mother dear," he cried. "Father—grandfather—"

"I know," said his mother, "they have won. You got there in time! Oh, thank God!"

THE END